Lobbying against saving our planet

The Toronto Star

June 15, 2023 Thursday

ONT Edition

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Section: OPINION; Pg. A17

Length: 669 words

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Body

With outright climate denialism largely behind us, we keep moving on through more sophisticated stages of climate inaction.

Currently, even as large swaths of North America became engulfed in wildfire smoke last week, we seem lodged in a new stage of inaction based on the notion "we're all to blame."

Or, as Majid Al Suwaidi put it: "There's no simple bad guy, good guy in this discussion."

Framed this way - that it's up to all of us to reduce emissions - climate action takes on the feel of a communal effort with us all rooting for the same team.

Of course, there's nothing wrong with communal effort. But this framing prevents us from seeing what's really going on: yes, we all behave in ways that emit carbon (although some of us emit way more than others).

But - and this is the nub of it - we're not all actively blocking climate action.

Rather, most of us are trying in small ways to reduce our carbon footprint. The problem is that there are immensely powerful forces out there using their clout to block the world from taking the urgent action needed to avert ever-worsening climate chaos.

So, sorry Mr. Al Suwaidi, but there is a bad guy in this discussion and that is Big Oil.

It's not surprising that Al Suwaidi would avoid acknowledging this. After all, he's an aide to Sultan Al Jaber, who heads up the national oil company of the United Arab Emirates, as well as heading up the UN climate negotiations to be held there next November. The fact that the sultan is heading up both is a perfect example of the sort of communal effort on climate change that feels good, but has gotten us nowhere.

To get somewhere, we have to start centre-staging the truly immoral role played by Big Oil. Otherwise, we end up duped into believing that what holds us back is the refusal of ordinary Canadians to give up their fossil-fuel-guzzling cars.

True, some Canadians would refuse and they would be goaded on by the oil lobby and the Freedom Convoy crowd. But the majority of Canadians are sufficiently freaked out by wildfires, heat domes and flooding to be ready to transition to clean energy (especially since it wouldn't have to impact their lifestyles that much) - if only there was some serious government leadership.

But there isn't. Justin Trudeau, knowing the public fears climate change, fashions himself a climate warrior.

But he largely succumbs to oil industry demands, revealing his warrior posture to be more fashion accessory than commitment.

It's easy to see how this happens; Big Oil is relentless in its opposition to climate action.

A fascinating study by the corporate mapping project of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives documents that the oil industry lobbied government officials 11,452 times - with a heavy focus on lobbying senior officials responsible for climate policies - during a seven-year period spanning the governments of Stephen Harper's Conservatives and Justin Trudeau's Liberals.

Both governments appear to have responded to this constant pressure by giving Big Oil a say in our climate policies, leaving Canada with a terrible record on reducing emissions - far worse than many comparable nations.

As climate journalist Barry Saxifrage has documented, key nations - including Germany, France, the U.K., Sweden and Norway - have significantly reduced vehicle emissions, largely by raising taxes on gas-guzzlers and cutting taxes on battery-electric vehicles.

In case you're tempted to excuse Canada's dismal performance because we're economically reliant on oil, Saxifrage notes that oil is also central to Norway's economy, yet Norway has dramatically reduced emissions. (Last year, 78 per cent of new vehicles purchased in Norway were battery-electric, compared to just 6 per cent in Canada - and 1 per cent in Alberta.)

Canadians are just as reasonable as Norwegians. If only we had a government willing to stand up to the menace of Big Oil.

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Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Subject: CLIMATE ACTION (90%); CLIMATE CHANGE (89%); FIRES (89%); LOBBYING (89%); WILDFIRES (89%); EMISSIONS (77%); POLLUTION MONITORING, PREVENTION & REMEDIATION (77%); ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT (75%); REPORTS, REVIEWS & SECTIONS (74%); SOCIETY, SOCIAL ASSISTANCE & LIFESTYLE (64%); UNITED NATIONS (63%); EDITORIALS & OPINIONS (59%)

Industry: ENERGY & UTILITIES (89%); OIL & GAS INDUSTRY (89%); EMISSIONS (77%); FOSSIL FUELS (70%)

Geographic: CANADA (94%); NORTH AMERICA (79%); UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (79%)

Load-Date: June 15, 2023

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